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ABSTRACT

The Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities (ACLD) position statement focuses on the development of a Regular Education/Special Education Initiative (RE/SEI). RE/SEI is defined as a system of integrated planning, delivery, and evaluation of the effects of services to all students. The program would incorporate management of special and regular education. Recommendations are made for (1) continuation of P.L. 94-142 (The Education for All Handicapped Children Act) and Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act, (2) pilot programs to test the efficacy of the RE/SEI concept; and (3) competency training of all involved personnel in preservice and inservice preparation programs. ACLD affirms that learning disabled students need more than a "watered down" special education and that there has been insufficient time and funds expended to meet the promise of P.L. 94-142. The position paper concludes with descriptions and definitions of specific learning disabilities. (CL)

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POSITION STATEMENT

ON

A REGULAR EDUCATION/SPECIAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE

MARCH 1986

INTRODUCTION

ACLD, Inc. has long maintained that educational programs for students with learning disabilities would be more effective and efficient if the various components of education including special education, regular education, therapies, supportive services, and parent involvement were integrated, rather than planned and administered separately. Integrated education is desirable for all students whether eligible for specialized services prescribed by Public Law 94-142 or not.

In our public schools today, students representing varied problems and needs are in the regular classroom. These may be students with cultural deprivation, economic disadvantage, slow learning ability, poor academic preparation, motivational deficiency, giftedness, special talents, and/or handicaps. Unfortunately, many of these students are not having their needs met in the regular classroom due, to a large degree, to barriers identified by a recent federal Task Force on Learning Problems, namely, 1) attitudinal and philosophical, 2) administrative and organization, 3) resource, 4) instructional and delivery, and 5) personnel preparation barriers. Another major reason students' needs are not met is the lack of integrated planning and delivery of all resources and available special services. All of these factors are confounded by the present economy and increased demands for educational excellence, competency testing, higher grading standards, and diploma and graduation criteria.

Consequently, ACLD, Inc. applauds the U. S. Department of Education's interest in an attempt to provide appropriate services in the regular classroom for students with a wide range of needs. At the same time, ACLD, Inc. respectfully points out that, when intervention in the regular classroom is unsuccessful for a trial period, those students who have not been properly identified as handicapped should be considered for special education evaluation and their eligibility for special education services determined.

This position statement, along with its recommendations, is made as part of ACLD, Inc.'s effort to assist in improving the delivery systems and instructional methods to students with learning disabilities and other learning problems, and, also, to safeguard the positive growth of services since the passage of P.L. 94-142.

EC190333

A REGULAR EDUCATION/SPECIAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE

ACLD, Inc. defines a Regular Education/Special Education Initiative (RE/SEI) as a system of integrated planning, delivery, and evaluation of the effects of services to all students. Such a concept would require an integrated system of management, combining regular education including its varied dimensions, and special education, under the cooperative efforts of regular and special educators, school administrators, teacher certification boards, planners and administrators of teacher preparation programs in the institutions of higher education, and the regular and special education professional and advocacy organizations.

In no way does the definition of RE/SEI suggest diminution of services to students adjudged handicapped and eligible for special education services under P.L. 94-142.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I. P.L. 94-142 and Sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 shall be preserved as they now exist.

II. The efficacy of the RE/SEI concept shall be tested through pilot programs.

   A. Such pilot programs should be of a three to five year duration and a funding cycle shall be set that gives sufficient lead time to participants to designate appropriate project personnel.

   B. Pilot Programs should be federally funded, and, because RE/SEI is an integrated program, the planning for Requests for Proposals and the funding of pilot projects should be a shared responsibility of regular and special education.

   C. The Request for Proposals shall require procedures for the following:

      1. Assurance that there will be full implementation of the principles of P.L. 94-142:

         a. Clear procedures for determining the need for special education and related services

         b. Definition of the circumstances under which levels of services shall be changed

         c. Some flexibility in the use of funding for the purpose of experimental programs

      2. Tight controls and monitoring system

      3. Accountability of administrators and teachers

4. Demonstration of effective interventions which facilitate appropriate referral and prevent inappropriate placement

5. Incentives for teachers

6. Programs for students with learning problems to be coordinated across grade levels and schools

7. Data collection for every student involved in the pilot program which would include socio-demographic variables and all other educationally relevant variables

D. Before models are proposed to replace the existing programs, a validated data base must be developed for the proposed program.

III. The problems surrounding public education (above) prompt ACLD, Inc. to recommend, concurrent with and/or in lieu of any pilot projects, the following:

A. The Department of Education assume leadership for the enhancement of skills of all involved groups to meet the needs of all students enrolled in public schools:

1. Administrators to manage differential staffing and flexible grouping

2. Teachers for greater individualization of instruction and sensitivity to differentiated needs of students

3. Parents for increased participation in their children's educational process

4. Specialized personnel for team efforts

5. Related services personnel for appropriate diagnosis, consultation, therapies, and effective group process

6. Ancillary employees (such as bus drivers, custodial, secretarial, cafeteria workers) for comprehending and managing behavior

7. Students for sensitivity to self and others and self-advocacy

B. The above competency training shall be incorporated into pre-service preparation programs and inservice programs involving professional, parent, and advocacy organizations.

C. Local education agencies shall continue and improve the Annual Child Find at all levels.

D. Local education agencies shall develop and implement transition plans that emphasize a continuum program from one school level to another (pre-school to elementary, to intermediate, to high school, to post secondary) including vocational education, technical schools, community-based programs, rehabilitation, and college.

E. All local education agencies shall expand their curriculum to include intervention strategies to improve social, emotional and academic performance at school, home, and in the community.

F. The Department of Education should encourage research into the effectiveness of current resource room programs which may offer insufficient services for students with learning disabilities currently enrolled.

G. ACLD, Inc. shall have representatives serving as official consultants to the U. S. Department of Education in developing plans for a RE/SEI.

CONCLUSIONS

ACLD, Inc. believes Specific Learning Disabilities is a lifelong condition that pervades all aspects of life and can seriously hamper employment and independent living capacity. It is a misconception that many persons with learning disabilities have mild transitory disorders and therefore need only a "watered down" special education. ACLD, Inc. believes that P.L. 94-142 is a significant law and that insufficient time and funds have been expended to fulfill its promise and meet the intent of the law. Consequently, we endorse continued efforts to fulfill the intent of the law, while recognizing that new approaches need to be explored to meet the needs of all students.

ACLD, Inc. recognizes that accommodations in regular classes may be the least restrictive environment for some identified students with Specific Learning Disabilities and other P.L. 94-142 categories, provided their needs are recognized and the students are protected under the law.

These proposals shall not preempt or exclude any student with Specific Learning Disabilities from the protection and safeguards of P.L. 94-142 or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; rather, they shall work in conjunction with all the laws which guarantee free, appropriate education for all handicapped students in the least restrictive environment with needed support services.

ACLD Description: Specific Learning Disabilities

The ACLD, Inc. description of the condition termed specific learning disabilities encompasses, endorses and broadens the definition of specific learning disabilities as defined in the Education of the Handicapped Act of 1975.

ACLD Description: The Condition

Specific Learning Disabilities is a chronic condition of presumed neurological origin which selectively interferes with the development, integration, and/or demonstration of verbal and/or non-verbal abilities.

Specific Learning Disabilities exists as a distinct handicapping condition and varies in its manifestations and in degree of severity.

Throughout life, the condition can affect self esteem, education, vocation, socialization, and/or daily living activities. (* Rationale attached)

The Education of the Handicapped Act of 1975 defines specific learning disabilities as follows:

20 U. S. C. 1412: Section 1401 (a) (15)

"Specific learning disability" means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculationns. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include children who have learning problems which are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, of mental retardation, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage."

Further, ACLD,Inc. supports the portions of the statement defining 'handicapped children' in order to prevent the use of generic terms and erroneous classification as handicapped: 20 U. S. C. 1412 SECTION 1401 (A) (1)

"As used in this part, the term handicapped children means those children educated in accordance with 300.530 - 300.534 as being mentally retarded, hard of hearing, deaf, speech impaired, visually handicapped, seriously emotionally disturbed, orthopedically impaired, other health impaired, deaf-blind, multi-handicapped, or as having specific learning disabilities, who because of those impairments need special education and related services."

* RATIONALE FOR ACLD CONDITION STATEMENT

SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES: (SLD) was selected to emphasize the fact that this condition has multiple manifestations but is not one of a generalized nature. Also, this is the term used in the Education of the Handicapped Act, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504.

CONDITION: was made synonamous with SLD because it is a state of being. It is not merely a term nor does it affect only children, which some definitions suggest. For the first time the condition, not the population, is described.

CHRONIC: was used to modify condition to define its persistence in spite of the apparent waxing and waning of its manifestations.

NEUROLOGICAL ORIGIN: was inserted because early and recent authors of definitions have agreed to a central nervous system basis.

PRESUMED: was used to modify "neurological origin" since there are not yet tools to determine origin definitively.

INTERFERES: is the active verb because the condition does not necessarily destroy or delete function but may variously impair, alter, or redirect functions.

SELECTIVELY: was used to qualify the global concept of "interferes" because the conditionn differentially affects abilities while leaving others unaffected.

DEVELOPMENT, INTEGRATION, and/or DEMONSTRATION: the phrase was selected to denote the disruptions the condition creates in developing and using intrinsic abilities.

VERBAL OR NON-VERBAL ABILITIES: were chosen as inclusive terms to emphasize not only receptive and expressive language problems, but also the conceptual and thinking difficulties, the integrating problems and motoric problems.

DISTINCT: signifies the SLD is separate and different from any other handicap and that any required interventions must be uniquely designed.

HANDICAPPING: was used because the condition meets the definitional criteria contained in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and to emphasize possible eligibility for assistance under all federal legislation for persons with handicaps.

VARIES IN ITS MANIFESTATIONS: was selected to emphasize that SLD does not equate with one or more functional deficits, e. g. reading disability, but is demonstrated in many signs and symptoms.

VARIES: was used to denote its apparent changes in manifestation within the individual and to state that it is not identical across occurrences.

DEGREES OF SEVERITY: was inserted to clarify further the variance of the condition among the population and the variance in the extent to which it interferes with major life skills.

THROUGHOUT LIFE: was used to emphasize that the condition persists into and throughout adulthood and it begins the sentence to connote its earlly presence.

AFFECT: was the preferred verb rather than disrupt, damage, impair, interrupt, etc., because the condition may depreciate the function of some abilities while other abilities may be enhanced through compensation.

CAN: was used to modify the verb "act" to allow for differential effects on the areas to follow.

SELF-ESTEEM, EDUCATION, VOCATION, SOCIALIZATION, and/or DAILY LIVING: were used to establish the potential innfluences of the condition not only on school achievement but also on areas of life such as family life, community living, selection of competitive employment, or even on learning how to drive a car.